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ABSTRACT

The Duluth (Minnesota) Public Schools have used participative management in various forms for several years, involving staff members in district level budgeting, school level budgeting and objective setting, and providing advice on a variety of issues. In 1984, the school board established participative management as a consistent, permanent district goal. With support from the board, the district superintendent, and the teachers' association, a budget was established and a process created for fostering participative management in all aspects of district decision making. The new policy challenged previous views of roles in the district power structure and replaced them with a successful emphasis on cooperative, mutual responsibility for improvements. As a major method of implementing participative management, the Quality of Work Life (QWL) process was developed by a committee made up of representatives from both management and labor. A facilitator was appointed to support communication both within the group and between the group and others in the district. Thirty-five QWL problem-solving teams were set up in building sites and for selected programs. Among the proposals implemented through the QWL process are an employee recognition program, a revised parent-teacher conference program, and a new school year calendar. (PGD)

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PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT:

A LABOR MANAGEMENT PROCESS THAT WORKS FOR KIDS

NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION CONVENTION
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1987

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Duluth Public Schools
Duluth, Minnesota

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PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT:
A LABOR MANAGEMENT PROCESS THAT WORKS FOR KIDS

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Duluth, Minnesota

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Education is a people business. In a school system, labor-management is a process of interacting with a variety of people in organizations and unions that represent the skilled resources of the district and the professionals who teach the students. The quality of education depends on the interaction between the staff and the students. Essential to providing the highest quality service is good relationships between staff, the various units and with management.

To improve the quality of education, the Duluth Public Schools implemented a participative management process. Participative management is an attitude and a management process that involves employees in decisions that affect the delivery of services. Participative management has many advantages in better meeting the mission of the institution, corporation, business or school district. The mission of the Duluth Public Schools is "to improve instruction and student achievement for a diverse student population."

The Duluth school system currently provides services to approximately 15,000 students. The district has 18 elementary, four junior high and three senior high schools, an area vocational-technical institute, a secondary vocational center and a number of alternative education programs for special needs students. Strong community education and adult education programs provide an important link with the community. Duluth has served as an outstanding model for Minnesota's expanding early childhood family education program.

The 1986-87 K-12 budget is approximately \$79,500,000. There are 1,015 full-time teachers in the school district and approximately 2,000 employees.

The school district provides a broad and varied program aimed at challenging students at every level. The success of this effort is evidenced by the achievement levels of Duluth students. Nationally normed test results have consistently shown Duluth students to be above the national average in academic achievement. Over sixty percent of Duluth students go on to college and many of those continue with post-graduate education. Twenty percent of high school graduates receive scholarship awards each year. Participative management has helped the School Board and staff better meet the mission of the school district. It is a labor management process that works for kids.

Forms of participative management have existed in the Duluth Public Schools for several years. Efforts had been made to involve staff in the budgeting process on the district level; individual schools had formed senates and elected staff for the purpose of determining building level objectives and budgets; and a variety of advisory committees had been established. Although there were many examples of staff participation in decision-making, no consistent district-wide process was in place.

Participative management as a school district goal was established by the School Board in 1984. A teacher strike and the desire of the School Board to improve management and employee relations were factors that led to this goal. The School Board, the Superintendent and the leadership of the Duluth Federation of Teachers (the school district's largest employee organization) formally stated their support for participative management--a budget was established, and a process was developed and implemented.

Participative management is not a specific program, but is more an attitude and a process. Lines of communications must be developed that allow and foster managers and employees to enter into joint decision-making at every level. It is essential that an attitude develop that recognizes that decisions made closest to implementation results in better decisions. To foster participative management, a formalized process that includes a policy, rules and regulations, a structure and budget is needed.

Participative management requires change for both administrators and staff members. Change is never easy and patience is required. Initially, some managers may feel threatened that employees will inhibit their ability to manage and encroach on their ability to make decisions. Principals remain responsible for what happens in their building. Employees may feel threatened by a perception of new responsibility they are asked to assume and the commitment of time that is required to make the process work. As trust and an understanding of roles in the process develops, the threat is minimized and cooperation develops resulting in many advantages for the students and the school district.

To be effective, the School Board must participate in establishing a participative management program. They must establish policy and provide the needed revenues through budget decisions. The policy of the Duluth Public Schools reads in part, "It is the goal of the School Board to achieve excellence in teaching, student achievement, community involvement, and general operations throughout the School District. It is the conviction of the Board that the only way in which that goal may be achieved is through pooling the talent and wisdom of all of the employees of the District. Therefore, it

shall be the policy of the District that programs of employee involvement and participation in problem-solving and decision-making processes shall be encouraged. Specifically, excellence in management shall be understood to be that management which:

- encourages participation and creativity among staff
- builds commitment to shared goals
- structures employee involvement so employees are routinely involved in decisions which affect them
- sets a high priority on advocating for ideas generated by subordinates
- develops a strong sense of trust and collegiality among all staff members in the pursuit of the goal of excellence.

Therefore, all supervisory personnel including principals, educational directors, directors and superintendents shall be expected to create and maintain a work environment that encourages employee participation, enhances communications within the District and promotes the general welfare of students and the morale of staff."

The Duluth Public School Board established a budget. The emphasis was on internal communications, and the school district's Communications Officer was directed to facilitate the process.

One major method to implement participative management in the Duluth school system is through a Quality of Work Life (QWL) process. This Quality of Work Life process was developed by a labor management committee consisting of top management and the leadership of the teachers' organization - The Duluth Federation of Teachers (DFT). Representation on the committee consisted of: two School Board members, the Superintendent of Schools, the Assistant

Superintendent for Instruction, the Assistant Superintendent for Business Affairs, the Director of Personnel, and two principals from management and the executive board of the Federation of Teachers represented employees. The Communications Facilitator served as a communications link within the group and to the District.

As the structure and process developed, the labor management committee became the Quality of Work Life Steering Committee. Membership on this committee remained the same. The committee is co-chaired by a member from management and an employee member. Thirty-five Quality of Work Life problem-solving teams were set up in the building sites and for selected programs. Membership on the building teams included the school principal or program supervisor and the building steward. Additional membership on the site committee is made up of 8 to 12 staff member volunteers including teachers, maintenance personnel, secretaries, aides, cooks and other employee group representatives when appropriate. Guidelines were established for the operation of the groups.

The Steering Committee works through a problem-solving process and identifies issues of a district-wide concern for consideration. These issues may be brought to the group by individual members or through referral from a building level Quality of Work Life committee. Employee relations and contract issues may be discussed at the Steering Committee level if they are not in the grievance procedure or in bargaining. Although the Steering Committee develops proposals for change, it is not a decision-making body. At the building level, contract issues are not discussed. The process respects the contract and collective bargaining.

Some key concepts for the Quality of Work Life (QWL) participative management process include:

- The Quality of Work Life process is designed to improve communication, trust and problem-solving related to the quality of work life of all employees in work sites.
- The Quality of Work Life process is "change oriented". It provides a process to identify priority change needs, prioritize, research, identify and evaluate solutions, present proposed solutions, decide, implement and follow-up.
- Quality of Work Life is a process and not a specific program. This process encourages all members of the organization to participate in management decisions that affect their work life and enhances more effective decision-making.
- The Quality of Work Life process is not a substitute for administration. It does enhance cooperation and communication and tends to result in better "specific" decisions and programs that benefit all employees and students.
- The building and program level Quality of Work Life process does not deal with issues related to contract and negotiations. Issues that may arise that relate to the contract and negotiations are referred to the appropriate employee group and administration. Issues related to the contract and not in negotiations may be discussed in the Steering Committee with agreement of the unit, administration and School Board. In no case does the Quality of Work Life process substitute for negotiations or unit contracts.

- The Quality of Work Life Committee and process does not deal with personalities or evaluation of specific individuals. Issues are discussed and worked with in an atmosphere of mutual respect.
- Inherent in the Quality of Work Life process is the recognition that each member of the organization is critical to the success of the organization, that each member has value and that the insights and contributions of each member are needed to identify and implement successful change.
- Issues are brought to the Quality of Work Life committee through members of the committee. Issues are prioritized and researched. Proposals for solution or change are submitted to or agreed to by the committee. If the solution can be implemented, after consensus, it is implemented by the administration. If the proposed solution has implications beyond the building or department, it may be submitted to the proper administrative personnel for action. Proposals are to be implemented or reasons are given for not implementing the proposed solution.
- All actions of the committee are accomplished through consensus.
- Meetings of the Quality of Work Life committees are held on work time. Duluth has developed a process to award compensatory time when this is necessary because of scheduling.

Some examples of proposals implemented through the work of the Quality of Work Life Steering Committee include an employee recognition program, a revised parent/teacher conference program and schedule, and a revised school year calendar. The Committee is currently completing work on a health and wellness program for the District.

Each building and program Quality of Work Life group has implemented many proposals. These range from budgeting procedures, different approaches to scheduling, lunchroom monitoring and extra assignments to the movement of telephones, changes in message systems and Xeroxing procedures. What is significant is that employee insights and concerns are heard, communication is increased and staff have ownership of solutions.

With patience and determination, Duluth continues to experience an increasingly successful participative management program. Relationships with employee groups have improved significantly. For example, before the Quality of Work Life process was implemented (1984), 152 grievances were filed by the Duluth Federation of Teachers--during the first semester of 1986-87, 9 have been filed. In the past, mistrust and suspicion were major factors that led to a teacher strike. Currently, through the Quality of Work Life process, many issues that would have been brought to the bargaining table are solved through dialogue and consensus. Participative management programs provide a process to reduce grievances and/or regulation items. Negotiations have improved as a result of a participative management approach.

The Quality of Work Life process does not provide instant results. It does and should take time to slowly refine and develop its impact upon the organization. It takes discipline, patience and care to slowly spread across, upward and downward in the organization. It isn't easy. It's hard work by a lot of people and involves the pain and stress any kind of change brings.

The Quality of Work Life approach is an operational means created out of a contemporary human expectation to provide input into decisions which affect one's work life. It recognizes the professionalism of licensed staff and the creativity and skills of non-licensed staff. Participative management is a pragmatic process of opening opportunities for human development as one means to provide better service as an organization. Too often the ends and aspirations of employees are still perceived as disparate from the ends of the organization, creating a dysfunction beneficial to neither the people in the organization nor the organization itself. Quality of Work Life is a means to combine those ends, and the students and citizens in Duluth are the beneficiaries.

Quality education depends on quality staff. Participative management and the QWL process in Duluth provide the structure and process to involve staff. Utilizing the creative insights and expertise of staff members improves relationships within the

district, identifies and solves problems and improves communication. The experience of true involvement in analyzing and solving problems builds feelings of greater commitment to school district goals and a "win-win" climate in which the quality and acceptance of decisions are enhanced through greater participation by those who have to implement and live with the consequences of those decisions. Students are the winners. Participative management is a labor management process that works for kids.